

A PROCLAMATION FROM THE KING OF KINGS NO. 1833

A SERMON
INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, APRIL 5, 1885,
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,
ON OCTOBER 16, 1884.

*“Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, Return, you backsliding Israel, says the LORD; and I will not cause my anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, says the LORD, and I will not keep anger forever. Only acknowledge your iniquity, that you have transgressed against the LORD your God, and have scattered your ways to the strangers under every green tree, and you have not obeyed my voice, says the LORD.”
Jeremiah 3:12-13.*

BACKSLIDERS are very many. Departing from the living God is no strange thing. Every church has to lament many that turn aside. In fact, it has become so common in many churches that they have not faith enough to hold to the Scriptural doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, as if the want of perseverance in mere professors could alter the truth that where the life and power of God are really in the soul there it will abide and remain.

Bitter are the disappointments which result from the apostasy of avowed disciples, and the declension of true followers of the Lamb. We sow, but when we expect to reap we fill not our bosoms with sheaves, for many of those who sprung up hastily from the stony ground are withered as soon as the sun has risen. The morning cloud charms us with the hope of rain, but it soon vanishes. The early dew gives us promise of moisture, but it is exhaled, and the earth is hot beneath our feet. Our hearts ache because of blighted hopes where we looked for blessed results.

And not only is it a common thing for men who profess godliness, and for a while run well, suddenly to turn aside, but even God's own people do not keep up the pace as they should. Many Christians are one while hot, and another lukewarm, and even cold. They are diligent and fervent today, but idle and indifferent tomorrow. There are Galatians among us still, who seem one way or another to be bewitched with error.

Even the best of believers are not always at their best. Who among us has not had cause to make confession that he has not kept up to his first love at all times? Neither has his lamp been always clearly burning, nor has he himself been all through the night equally wakeful and watchful for the coming of the Lord. The wise virgins sleep as well as the foolish ones. Alas, that it should be so! Had it not been for the interposition of God's grace in many an instance, backslidings that have been healed, might have been backslidings unhealed, and the gaping wound might have bled to the dreadful weakness of those who suffered from it.

May God in infinite mercy help those of us who have been kept by His power until now, to rest in faith in Him, and may we be very careful that we slip not with our feet, and decline not with our hearts! Nor let our earnestness end with self, but let us pray with all our might for those who have wandered upon the dark mountains, that they may not wander for another hour, but that at once, ere this service is ended, they may be restored to the Shepherd and Bishop of their souls, and may find rest, as once they used to find it, at the feet of Jesus Christ.

Pray for me, that I may speak in the power of the Holy Spirit, so as to lead back unenlightened ones who are now stumbling upon the dark mountains. I feel deeply my need of such help, and would breathe my own desire to God in the language of our sweet poetess—

***“O strengthen me, that while I stand
Firm on the Rock, and strong in Thee,
I may stretch out a loving hand
To wrestlers within the troubled sea.”***

I. I shall keep to the passage before us, and we will commence with it at once, and notice first in the text THE PROCLAMATION.

The prophet receives this message, “Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, Return, you backsliding Israel, says the LORD.”

It was to be a proclamation, for God is King, and if His subjects rebel He does not lose the rights of His sovereignty. He sends, therefore, a royal message with all the power which belongs to the word of a king. “Go and proclaim.” It is meant to be a loud summons, such as a proclamation should be when the herald in the name of his royal master publishes a decree. “Go and proclaim.” It is to be done in state, with order and regularity, with a purpose, and with authority.

And so do I wish to speak at this time. Hear me, O my brother, while I plead with you in Christ’s stead. In the name of the Ever-Blessed, who has not lost His right to you, O backslider, you are called upon to return. In His name, who is your Creator and your Lord, is the message sent to you, “Return unto me.” It is not delivered as a mere piece of advice from myself personally, which you may treat as you like, because it comes from your friend and your equal, but it comes from your God and your King, to whom you must give an account by and by.

It is not even sent as a simple word of advice from Him, but the majesty of God is at the back of it, at your peril it will be if you trifle with it. I pray you act not so presumptuously. It is a proclamation which demands that every ear should hear it, and that every heart should bow before it. Only traitors will despise our message when the Lord says to us, “Go and proclaim these words, and say, Return.”

This proclamation is sent to the worst of sinners, to the very basest of backsliders. The proclamation is to be given publicly, but it was intended for a certain people, and meant for their hearts as well as their ears. It was meant for those who have backslidden, and the house of Israel contained many jet-black backsliders. They were people who had gone aside after beholding the most glorious manifestations of God. For unto what people did the God of the whole earth ever reveal Himself as He did unto Israel, a people that had been delivered by the plagues of Egypt, that had drunk of water from the rock, and had been fed upon angels’ food, a people in the midst of whom the peculiar presence of God had been revealed?

He had ransomed them, and fed them, and led them, and taught them, and they had been singularly indulged, and yet, for all that, they had turned aside from the living God. They were a provoking nation of backsliders because they turned aside to the basest idols. After knowing something of Him who is invisible, they made a golden calf, and said, “These are your gods, O Israel,” and in after years they bowed themselves before the lowest and most degrading shapes of idols. They went after the wickedness, and the bestialities of the nations among whom they dwelt, and they defiled themselves so that God, who never speaks too harshly, said, “They went a whoring after the gods of the heathen.”

They broke their marriage bonds to the one living and true God, and made themselves loathsome in His sight by the most detestable idolatries. It is sad that there should have been such a race of backsliders, but it is glorious to think that to such as these the message of God’s mercy was sent. They were the lowest grade of backsliders, and if there are any here tonight who must be put in the same list, it is to them that the message of God’s grace and mercy is to be proclaimed, and I do proclaim it in the name of Him that sent me.

These backsliders were old offenders, who had long been false to their vows and covenants. They went aside once and they were chastened, and they repented, but their hearts were not true, and so when the scourge was taken away they went aside again, and proved that deceit was bound up in their souls.

Many a time did He forgive them, and put back His wrath, but as often did they return to their provocations.

Many and many a time did He smile upon them again in favor, and forgive their transgressions, but they provoked Him unto jealousy yet more and more, until He declared that they were bent to backslide from Him. It seemed to be the way of them. It was ingrained in their nature. "Israel is a backsliding heifer," says the Lord. They would not go aright, they would turn aside.

Do I address any such in this discourse? O my hearers, may the Lord deal graciously with you by my means, and my heart shall sing for joy! I am not going to enlarge upon any of these points of character, for if the Spirit of God is dealing with you He will enlarge upon them.

I have lately met with a considerable number over whom I have both sorrowed and rejoiced, I think of them now with mingled feelings, because God is bringing them very low under a sense of their backsliding, and I am hoping that this will be a blessing to them. The Lord is chastening them, and I trust they will turn at His rebuke. Their sin, which was written with an iron pen upon the very horns of their altars, they did not see, and would not see, but now He says they shall see, and He is making them weep as they see.

I know that some of you bleed with an inward wound at the heart, a wound which man cannot reach, which only God can heal. I am glad that it is so, for this will convince you that you shall not be at ease away from God, but that in wandering from Him into the far country there shall come a mighty famine to you, and you shall begin to be in want. Oh, may your want drive you home to the great Father's house, where the best of welcomes awaits you!

The Israelite people were not only the worst kind of backsliders, but *they had already reaped in a very large measure the result of their backslidings*, for they had been carried away captive. They were taken away to the north country by the king of Assyria, far off from the land of promise which flowed with milk and honey. They were bond slaves under the cruelest of oppressors. They had suffered the loss of all things because they had departed from their God, and yet they had not learned the lesson which affliction was meant to teach them. It was still needful to call them to repentance, and God bade them return to Him—His proclamation was to them.

I have known men to come down from wealth to poverty through their sin. I have known them fall from health and happiness to disease and misery. I have seen them brought down from honorable associations to degradation and shame wholly as the result of their departing from the living God. While they walked with Him, all went well with them, but when they walked contrary to Him, He began to walk contrary to them.

There are some who hear me at this moment who know the meaning of that text, "The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways." They have sinned, and they have smarted, and in the smart this thought has come to their mind, "He will never forgive me. He has beaten me with the blows of a cruel one, He has set me for the target of all His arrows. His arrows drink up the blood of my soul. I am sorely wounded and broken in the place of dragons."

Yes, so was Israel carried away by Shalmaneser into a distant land, and yet they were bidden to return unto God with a promise of mercy. Captives and poverty-stricken, they sat down, and wept when they remembered Zion, and then came this royal proclamation of reconciliation upon repentance. From the throne whence they might have expected condemnation and the sentence of death, there came this mission, this word, this message, "Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, Return, you backsliding Israel, says the LORD."

I see some mercy, and that of no little kind, in the messenger who was sent to deliver this message, for it was Jeremiah, that man of a broken spirit, who could say of himself, "I am the man that has seen affliction." Somehow, your bright-eyed joyous spirit astonishes the backslider into greater grief. "Alas," he cries, "such joy I might have known, but I put it all aside!" Such reflections deepen the poor sinner's woe.

Moreover, the man that has never been emptied from vessel to vessel, and has had no experience of the bitterness of sin, is too apt to speak proudly, or at least harshly and severely, to a wandering brother. He does not sufficiently remember himself, lest he also is tempted. But as for Jeremiah, his eyes were red with weeping, and his cheeks were guttered by his burning tears, and when he spoke, there was a depth of pathos about every word. Thus he was qualified to meet mourning souls upon their own ground. How he longed for men to come back to God who had chosen them! How pathetically he exclaimed, "Oh that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!"

And God selected this man that he might go after the smitten ones, and proclaim in stately manner, blended with womanly tenderness, this message, "Return." I do not feel as fitted as Jeremiah, and yet I have an intense desire that any of you who have gone away from God would come back while I speak with you.

The Lord knows how this has burdened me of late, for I cannot bear it that you who have sunned yourselves in His smile should choose darkness. That you who once rejoiced in Christ, and gloried in His cross, should now be crucifying Him afresh, and putting Him to an open shame. Here is a huge world that "lies in the wicked one," and we need all our time to try and enlighten it, and meanwhile, you that are our camp followers, and as we thought, our fellow soldiers, have put up your swords, and gone over to the enemy. At least you act as if you had, and it pains us. It pains us at the heart.

Hear, then, at this hour, the proclamation which we will give forth as best we can, looking in your direction if you have gone up to the north, and proclaiming these words towards your place, your cold and shivering place, your place of darkness and of misery, your place in the far-off country. I say, we look anxiously and yet hopefully in your direction, and proclaim these words to you, "Thus says the LORD, Return."

So far concerning the proclamation.

II. But now, secondly, in our text we find A PRECEPT.

It is a very simple one, and as short as it is clear. It is given in the proclamation—"Return, you backsliding Israel." *Return*—be as you were, come back, repent, and do your first works. O wanderer, return to your God! You have forgotten Him, you have transgressed against Him, and you have grieved Him exceedingly. For these months you have not sought Him, nor called upon Him. You have not trusted Him nor confided in Him. You have not loved Him, nor sought His honor. Return! You can never be right if you stay where you are. All ills attend the man who forsakes His God. Come back—back to the old place of humiliation in His presence, of confession, of childlike faith, of holy consecration. Come back to the happy place which was yours when you were in your best estate. Yea, further back than that—back nearer to God than ever you were before. Return unto your God.

Hearken. This is the precept—return to your Savior, just as you are, come back to Him. Come back as you came at first, with your sin acknowledged, looking to His cross for pardon. Did you grow too great, and think you could live without your Savior? Return! Did you dream of being so perfect that you did not want His righteousness, for your own would suffice? Away with that glittering bauble, that idle notion of your perfection, and come back, and beat upon your breast, and say, "God be merciful to me a sinner."

Repent of your pride, and return again to your Lord Jesus Christ. He will as gladly receive you as a mother presses to her bosom a lost child. The road is paved for your return, the stumbling blocks are gathered out, and the door of the Father's house is open wide. Come yet again, and receive pardon and cleansing from the precious blood of Jesus. It has not lost its power. The fountain of cleansing is open, not only for the common sinner, but for you, the backslider, for remember how the Scripture has it, "A fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem."

It is open for those who are in the church of God already, as well as for those who are newly brought into it. Come at once, and tarry not. If your feet be foul with your wandering through the mire and through the slough, your Savior takes the towel yet again, and fills the basin from the ewer, and stoops

to wash your feet. Will you not have them washed at this moment till He can say to you again, “You are clean every whit”? You have once been washed in the atoning blood, and you need not now except to wash your feet, and when this is done all is well. Go and wash your brethren’s feet in gratitude. “When you are converted, strengthen your brethren.”

You see, then, dear friends, how the Lord puts it to you. “Return,” for where you lost your roll there you will find it. Mr. Bunyan pictures his pilgrim dropping his passport under the seat in that arbor at the bottom of the hill Difficulty, or half way up it, where he sat down to rest, and where he did not only rest, but fell into a sinful slumber. Under that very settle, whereon you sat, and went to sleep, you will find the roll which you must carry in your bosom to secure you a welcome at the Palace Beautiful. You must go back and look for your spiritual enjoyment where you lost it.

Did you lose it by neglect of prayer? Then search the closet through. Did you lose it by a dusty Bible? Dust that Bible, and search its pages till you find it. Did you lose it by neglect of the means of grace? Were your Sabbaths wasted, and week-night services neglected? Then go back, I say again, to the place where by your sin you allowed your holy confidence to slip from you, and there you will find it again. The point at which you diverged from the right road is the point that you must find, and come back to. “Repent, and do your first works,” is the Master’s call to you tonight. It is His royal proclamation, “Return, you backsliding Israel.”

But listen while I make this proclamation again in God’s name. *Return at once.* Delays are always dangerous, but never as dangerous as when they are proposed by backsliders. Return without another day’s indulgence in sin. The message tolerates no further backsliding. Come back at once, wait not for second thoughts. Your prompt, immediate thoughts are best.

And *come you back with all your heart.* Let there be no mimic repentance, no pretended returning. You shall find the Lord if you seek Him with all your heart, and all your soul. God help you to do it now!

And mind that you *return practically*, that is, that your life shall be changed, your idols broken, your omitted duties fulfilled with eagerness, neglected means of grace pursued with fervor, that done which you have left undone, and that evil forsaken into which you have gone with such headlong folly. When the Lord says, “Return,” He does not mean, “Think about returning, promise to return, talk about your wandering,” and all that, but He means that you should practically come back to Him with weeping and with supplication, with a true heart believing in the Lord Jesus Christ and beginning again.

“Alas,” says one, “I do not know whether I am a backslider, or whether I have been a hypocrite up till now!” Do not argue that question at all. I am constantly asked to decide for people whether they ever were true Christians, or were in error about their condition. It is a difficult inquiry, and of small practical value. I say to myself sometimes, “Well if I never was a child of God I know that I am a sinner, and Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, and I will at once trust in Him.” Thus I recover confidence. If I ever was a child of God, then I am a child of God, and He will bring me back, but if I never was a child of God, and my profession was all a mistake, yet still the free salvation sounds out its silver trumpet—

“Come, and welcome, sinner, come;”

and I hasten to accept the invitation. You can discuss the question of your previous character after you get back into the fold, but while you are out of it, it does not matter much to you. You had better leave such discussions till you are out of the reach of the wolf. In all probability it would be impossible for you to discover your precise condition, but, O poor soul, this is clear enough that the Lord cries to you “Return, you backsliding Israel.”

This precept is clear as noonday, and it is sent to you. Come back, with the whole of your nature, in all ways and respects, back to your God, and back to your Savior, and back to prayer, and back to holy living, and back to the people of God—back to the very church from which you have wandered. It will be wise to do that before another sun has risen. Come back to the Lord’s Supper, back to feeding

spiritually upon His flesh and upon His blood, and living alone in Him, and by Him, and to Him, and with Him. God help you to hear this precept, and to turn it into practical effect!

III. Now, listen, in the third place, to THE PROMISE, “Return, you backsliding Israel, says JEHOVAH, and I will not cause my anger to fall upon you.”

“I will not cause my anger to fall upon you.” See that anger, like a black cloud, charged not with refreshing rain, but with fire flakes that shall burn as they fall. Ay, burn their way into the very core of your being, as with the fires of hell. A sense of wrath is hell setting the soul on fire, till conscience flames with its own peculiar fierceness, and seems to anticipate the fire that never can be quenched.

You see that gathering storm around you, do you not? But here is the fair promise, “Return, and I will not cause my anger to fall upon you.” Not a flake of it shall burn you if you return unto your God. There is forgiveness, there is full, and free, and immediate forgiveness to be had. “I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, your transgressions, and as a cloud, your sins. Return unto me.”

This is a grand motive for coming back—the sin that separates is put away. He will wash you thoroughly from your iniquity, and cleanse you from your sin, and whatsoever you need He will give to you, and He will not upbraid you. When the father received the prodigal, did he remind him of his ingratitude, or of his wasting of his substance? Not a word of it, he kissed away the memory of his wrong-doing. He covered him with a robe of righteousness, and he put a new song into his mouth. The Lord is prepared to do that with you at this moment.

I know that your doubts and fears ask the question again and again, “Can it be possible?” All things are possible with God, and especially all deeds of mercy, for His mercy endures forever, and He delights in it. I know that you say, “Oh, but does the promise mean me, even me?” It means you, even you. You are a backslider, you plead guilty to the charge, and therefore it is to you that the promise is given. Accept the mercy. The man that is condemned by that description—the “backslider”—is the man who is commanded to return, and he is the man to whom the promise is made, “I will not cause my anger to fall upon you.” In all this you can see yourself as in a looking-glass.

I find that the passage might be read, “I will not cause my face to fall upon you,” meaning this—that if the child of God comes back, God will not look angry at him any more. This is a very great blessing, for when the Lord does not lay punishment upon His people by way of judgment and wrath, yet He does often hide His face from them, or frowns upon them like a cruel one. If you have sinned, God cannot smile upon you, He must chasten you. His own words are, “You only have I known of all the families of the earth: *therefore* I will punish you for all your iniquities.”

You are a child, and therefore you must be whipped if you do wrong. Love ensures you the chastisement. “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.” But the great Father here shows that He will not continue to frown on you. He will not make His face to fall at the mention of you. He has said, “I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for my anger is turned away from them.” He might justly say, “You are my child, but I cannot speak comfortably to you, for you are so disobedient that I must send you to a distance, and make you feel the evil of disobedience.”

But instead of that, He says, “I will not cause my anger to fall upon you. I will not even cause my face to fall at the sight of you, but I will receive you graciously. I will in tender mercy put away your transgressions, and reveal my love to you.” “Come now, and let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” Will you not come to Him, when He speaks thus?

“Return!

O erring, yet beloved!

I wait to bind thy bleeding feet, for keen

And rankling are the thorns where thou have been;

I wait to give you pardon, love, and rest.

Is not My joy to see you safe and blest?

Return! I wait to hear once more thy voice,

To welcome thee anew, and bid ythy heart rejoice.”

A woman has a husband, who has loved her as his own, but she has lent her ear to a serpent—to one who with words of flattery has beguiled her, and she has sinned against her fidelity. She has defiled herself with another, and she has gone away, far away, and the man who has deceived her has forsaken her. She is now a woman of a sorrowful spirit, broken down and cast off. A friend whispers to her, “Return to your husband, for it was better with you then than now.”

But this is her stumbling block, “Will he receive me? Can he receive me? I have dishonored him. Will he take me back again? Can I expect the love that gladdened my girlish days to be lavished upon me again? Will he not call me an outcast, and say that I have darkened his house, and shall never enter it again?” But if the message comes to her, “He will receive you graciously, and love you freely,” will she not hasten home? When she learns that the anger which he felt is gone, and that his heart yearns towards her, will she not fly home as on the wings of the wind?

Unless she has become a monster of wantonness, she will seek the man whom she has grieved, and at his feet she will fall in gratitude for his forgiveness. The parable is concerning ourselves who have backslidden from the Lord Jesus Christ. Shall we not also return now that we hear Him thus inviting us to come back—yea, making a royal proclamation of His grace? “Return, you backsliding Israel, says the LORD; and I will not cause my anger to fall upon you.” The Lord grant that this word may go home to those whom He has ordained to bless.

IV. I pass on, in the next place, fourthly, to notice THE ARGUMENT.

The argument here used is twofold, and you will recollect the two arguments all the more readily because they begin with the same letter—Mercy and Marriage. We have, in the twelfth verse, “For I am *merciful*, says the LORD,” and in the fourteenth verse, “For I am *married* unto you.”

Here is, first, *God’s mercy*. Nothing delights God more than to forgive sin—at this blessed work He is at home. To some men it is a hard task to forgive an injury. They do it with a squeeze, and a twist, and a wrench, and even then it is questionable if it be done at all, for forced forgiveness is no forgiveness. Some are not unlike the dying man who said to the priest, “If I die you will remember that I forgive Pat Maloney, but if I live I’ll pay him back as soon as I can.”

Many forgive because they cannot revenge. Their virtue is the result of their inability to be vicious. But with God, it is His nature to forgive. He is love, and mercy is a drop from the honeycomb of love. God must be just, but to punish is His left-handed labor, while to forgive is His right-handed work. He is happy at it. He finds pleasure in man’s turning to Him, and finding life. Mercy was His last-born attribute. Until sin came there was no room for mercy—the mercy that forgives, and therefore mercy is God’s Benjamin, the son of His right hand, and He delights to give to it ten times as much as to His other attributes when they feast together. It is written, “He delights in mercy,” but I never read that He delights in justice, or delights in wisdom, or delights in power. He delights in mercy. God is charmed when He can wash a scarlet sinner white. It is the heaven of His heaven to receive a hell-black sinner to His heart, and put away his sin. “I am merciful,” says the LORD.

Did I hear a trembling voice exclaim, “Oh, but you do not know what I have done, sir”? No, and “sir” does not want to know, but then I know that the Lord delights in mercy. Perhaps you had better not tell those midnight deeds, those sins that have defiled you through and through. The confessional is by no means a healthy place, the smell of it is putrid. Confess to God, and not to me. You have lain in the dye till you are soaked and saturated in sin. You are dyed ingrain with the scarlet of iniquity, but the Lord delights to take out these glaring stains. Things which are impossible with man are the joy of God. Therefore come to Him, and believe in His mercy and doubt no longer, but lovingly receive what He lovingly gives.

As for you who once knew Him, and loved Him, and rejoiced in Him, I want you just to dwell on that second argument, namely, *marriage*. “For I am married unto you, says the LORD.” Oh, those were blessed days when you used to sing—

*“Tis done, the great transaction’s done!
I am my Lord’s, and He is mine.
He drew me, and I followed on,
Charmed to confess the voice divine.”*

And then you used to join with all of us in singing—

*“Happy day! Happy day!
When Jesus washed my sins away.”*

Ah, poor soul, where have you been since that? You have been where you ought not to have been and now your Bridegroom says, “Return, for I am married unto you. You may have put off the ring, but you are Mine for all that, and I will have you come back to Me. Return.”

The bonds that Christ makes are not to be broken. The favor that Christ has shown is not to be removed. Stronger than death and Hell is the love of Christ and who shall separate us from it? Notwithstanding all your sins and iniquities, He says, “Return, for I am married unto you, says the LORD.” It is done and though *you* do not stand to it, *He* does! The great transaction still stands on His part—though you believe not, He abides faithful!

He has bought you with His blood and the price will never return into His veins. He has loved you with an everlasting love, and therefore it cannot cease. In that love He will ever rest, nor from His oath return. Wherefore come back to Him.

*“Return!
O fallen, yet not lost!
Can you forget the life for thee laid down,
The taunts, the scourging, and the thorny crown?
When o’er you first my spotless robe I spread,
And poured the oil of joy upon thy head,
How did thy wakening heart within you burn!
Can you remember all, and will you not return?”*

*Return!
O chosen of my love!
Fear not to meet your beckoning Savior’s view;
Long ere I called thee by thy name, I knew
That very treacherously thou wouldst deal;
Now I have seen thy ways, yet I will heal.
Return! Will thou yet linger far from Me?
My wrath is turned away, I have redeemed thee.”*

V. And I finish (for time has failed me) by noticing THE ADVICE that He here gives as to how we are to return.

He says, “*Only acknowledge your iniquity.*” “Oh,” you have said, “I cannot get back to God. It is such a long way back to Him. I feel that I have to set myself right, and in that process to pass through a world of sorrow.” Yet the Lord says, “*Only acknowledge.*” I rejoice in those blessed, “*onlys*” of the Bible! “*Only acknowledge your iniquity.*” “Alas, I have so wandered!” Acknowledge it. “But I have done it so many times!” Acknowledge it. “But I have wandered against light and knowledge!” Acknowledge it.

It is not a hard thing to do, to get you to your chamber, and before God confess your faults. You have, first of all, to have a knowledge of it, and then to *ac*-knowledge it. Feel your sin, and then confess it. Be convinced of it, and then plead guilty at the judgment seat. Do not attempt to excuse it, or to make apologies for it. As long as you do so, you will never get peace, but let this perilous stuff be purged from

your soul by a clear, plain acknowledgment, such as David made when he said, “Deliver me from blood-guiltiness.” He had tried to call his crime by other names, but his forgiveness came when he admitted that it was murder. When we know our sin, God will make us to know His grace, but if we are self-righteous, our pride will be our ruin.

“What am I to acknowledge?” Acknowledge chiefly three things.

Your breach of covenant—that you have transgressed against JEHOVAH your God. You professed to be a child of God, a member of Christ, a temple of the Holy Ghost, and you have been false to all these avowals. You have broken your vows, you have been false to your baptism, false to your communion at the Lord’s Supper, false to your church membership, false to your prayers. Go and tell the Lord all this, and acknowledge that you have transgressed against JEHOVAH your God.

Next acknowledge *your greedy sin*—that you “have scattered your ways to the strangers under every green tree.” Israel had sinned wherever she had an opportunity—sinned openly. You would not have thought that she would have dared to do it—sinned again and again, till as many as there were trees in the grove were her adulteries with idol gods. Confess this crime if it be indeed true, “Lord, I have sinned with both hands since I have departed from You. I have committed sins of the eyes, and sins of the feet, and sins of the hand, sins of the head, and sins of the heart, sins against Your holy law, sins against Your love and blood, sins immense and innumerable. I might as well hope to count the drops that make the ocean, as to tell the number of my sins.”

Make this confession heartily and explicitly. Do not stutter over it, and try to lessen it, but bring it straight out in deep humility. As a backslider you have done far more evil than you know of, and there is no fear of your exaggerating your guilt.

And I finish with this, “*You have not obeyed my voice, says the LORD.*” That is to say, you have been guilty of *sins of omission*. This is sufficient to swamp any one of us. Our sins of commission may be few, but as for our omissions, these would sink me, I know, past all hope, were it not for the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ. Dear friend, hasten to acknowledge your omissions.

Confess also your *hardness of heart*. God has spoken, and you would not hear. He has entreated, and you would not regard Him. He has come very near to you, and you have turned your back on Him. Thus He complains of you, “I have spoken, and you would not hear. You have not obeyed my voice.”

Confess also your *ingratitude*. His voice, which is your Father’s voice, you have not heard or obeyed. What unnaturalness! Shall a wife not know her husband’s voice? Shall a brother forget his brothers? Yet it is so with some of you who once used to be with us. You were our joy, and we were your joy, and God the joy of us both, but you have gone aside, you have left your first love. You have departed from the ways of the Lord.

Yet remember at this moment there are no judgments for you, no threats, and no scolding words for you, but simply this, “Only return.” The heart of love has room in it for you. Hasten home to Him who is your only resting place. You can never be happy where you are, and as you are. You have tried it. Oh, how long you have tried it, but you are going downward, and waxing worse and worse.

Oh, that you would say, “I will end it, I will end it. Never more will I depart from Him who has redeemed me with His blood. I will yield myself to Him at once.” Happy is the preacher if this has been effected by the Spirit of God. Happy shall you be, also, and happy are these Christian folk to know that such a thing has been done in their midst. God bless you, for Jesus’ sake! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—JEREMIAH 3:12-25

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—373, 476, 521

LETTER FROM MR. SPURGEON:

MR. SPURGEON has not been very well for the last few days, but he is now much better, and feels assured of returning to his work with renewed energy. He begs his friends to pray for this desirable blessing, and also for the blessing of God upon the Conference of the Pastors' College, which will take place in the beginning of May. It is of the utmost importance that the pastors then assembled should be filled with the Spirit of God. The times are evil. The Gospel is needed. The Spirit of God can alone make it effectual. Let all the saints pray mightily for a divine visitation. Mr. SPURGEON'S College work also needs to be aided by the liberality of his friends at this time, and he would remind them of it very hopefully.

Mentone, March 27, 1885

Taken from The C. H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.